



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

THE PURPOSE AND PLAN OF THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW.*

By ERNEST D. BURTON,
The University of Chicago.

III. THE PURPOSE WITH WHICH THE EVANGELIST WROTE.

ALIKE the material and the general structure of the book suggest that we have to do here with a work which is in a sense historical or biographical. The material is mainly narrative in form, consisting of reports of deeds done and discourses uttered on certain occasions, not of discussion or formal argument by the writer of the book. It is a history, however, which gathers around the person of Jesus; only such events and persons as stand in immediate relation to him are spoken of, and these only in so far as they are related to him. The book falls into six main parts (*cf.* the analysis at the end of this article), representing periods of the life of Jesus and arranged in chronological order, from his birth to his resurrection.

Yet before it is decided that, because the material is of a biographical character and the main structure chronological, therefore the end of the writer is attained when he has given an historically correct representation of the life of Jesus, or even, perhaps, when he has told such facts about the life of Jesus as are known to him, certain other considerations must be taken into account. It must be remembered that it was in accordance with the literary method of the first Christian century and of the adjacent periods to employ historical material for argumentative purposes, and that, too, without casting the material into the form of an argument or even stating anywhere in the course of the narrative what the facts were intended to prove. It was assumed that the reader or hearer would be shrewd enough to discover this for himself, and this assumption was apparently amply justified.

*The preceding portion of this article appeared in the January number.

This use of historical material for argumentative purposes, this clothing of argument in narrative form, finds several clear illustrations in the New Testament. In the discourse of Jesus in the synagogue at Nazareth, as related in Luke 4: 16-30, Jesus replies to the thought of the Nazarenes, which they have not even openly expressed, by relating two events from Old Testament history; he does not state what these events prove, and modern interpreters are somewhat puzzled to tell precisely what he did intend to prove by them. But there is no doubt that he intended that they should teach something not directly expressed in them, and that the Nazarene congregation so understood him. The speeches in the book of Acts are almost all of them of the same character, from the speech of Peter on the day of Pentecost down to the later speeches of Paul. The two best illustrations are furnished by the speech of Stephen before the council, which is very evidently of argumentative purpose, yet which leaves the purpose so entirely unstated that most readers today probably entirely fail to perceive it, and the speech of Paul at Pisidian Antioch, which has the same characteristics, only less strongly marked. The fourth gospel furnishes an illustration of a book almost wholly made up of narrative material (including in that term conversations and discourses assigned to certain occasions), yet explicitly stated by the writer to have been written with the purpose of convincing men of a certain doctrinal proposition, this again for the purpose of producing a certain moral result (20: 30, 31). The book of Acts also, though the writer has not stated a definite argumentative purpose, is almost universally admitted to have been written for such a purpose; precisely what the purpose was interpreters still dispute.

In view of this well-established literary custom, of which there are abundant examples in the New Testament literature itself, it is only natural to ask whether our gospel also gives evidence of such a purpose on the part of its writer. Such evidence does, in fact, appear the moment we carry our study of the structure of the book beyond a division into its six main parts. The first main division, though including only material pertaining to the ancestry, birth, and infancy of Jesus, yet makes an

evidential use of every event which it relates, pointing out how in each of the narrated facts Old Testament prophecy was fulfilled in Jesus. The Galilean ministry is scarcely less evidently constructed on a plan which is more logical than chronological, the whole constituting an exposition of the nature of the kingdom of heaven, the way in which it must be received, and the way in which the Jews did actually receive it, foreshadowing their rejection of the Messiah, and their own consequent downfall (*cf.* the analysis). The passion week, though the material is, with a few significant exceptions, apparently arranged on a chronological plan, is yet so treated as to present the evidence for the fact that Christ and his kingdom were explicitly and clearly presented to the Jews for their acceptance, with warning of the consequences to them of rejection, and that in the face of such presentation and such warning they definitely rejected Christ and the kingdom.

But if the book has an argumentative purpose, which is either the dominant one or one which is coördinate with a more distinctly historical aim, precisely what is it that the author conceives his narrative to prove and of which he wishes to convince his readers? The answer must be gained by observing on what the writer lays emphasis. Notice, then, what the passages already cited have, in part, shown, the characteristic ideas of this gospel. The writer believes in the Old Testament, and holds that its Messianic prophecies are fulfilled in Jesus (1:23, etc.); Jesus himself held to the divine and permanent authority of the Old Testament ethical teaching (5:17 ff.; 15:3 ff., etc.), though indirectly criticising the statutory legislation or affirming its temporary character (5:21-48 *passim*; 9:14-17; 15:10-20; 19:8); he addressed himself to the Jews, announced the near approach of the kingdom of heaven, adapted his instruction to their point of view (see all the discourses); limited his own personal mission to them (15:24), and instructed his disciples when he sent them out to do the same (10:5, 6); when, despite the fact that multitudes followed him and true disciples were won, it became evident that the leaders of the people would reject him, he warned them of the danger of such

rejection (8:11, 12; 12:38-45; *cf.* the words of John the Baptist, 3:9), and as opposition grew and approached its culmination in the determination to put him to death, he scathingly rebuked the Pharisees, under whose influence the nation was rejecting its Messiah (chap. 23, esp. vs. 13), announced with increasing distinctness the direful results of such rejection to the nation and to Judaism itself, even definitely declaring the rejection of the nation by God (see 21:33-46; 22:1-14; but especially 21:42, 43; 22:7; 23:36, 38; 24:2); and finally, after his final rejection, his death and triumphant resurrection, he commissioned his disciples no longer to go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, but to make disciples of all nations (28:19).

These are characteristics which are not common to all our gospels; they are, in large part, peculiar to Matthew; they show that the purpose of this argument in narrative form is to prove that Jesus is the true Messiah of the Jews; that he announced and founded the kingdom of God, expounding its true nature, and setting forth its relation to the Old Testament religion; that he came, first of all, to the Jewish nation; that, when they showed signs of a disposition not to receive his message, he warned them that the consequence of such rejection would be that the kingdom would be taken from them; that, in fact, they did in the face of all this warning and instruction reject Jesus and put him to death; and that, consequently, the kingdom ceased to be in any distinctive sense Jewish, and in place of the old national dispensation there was created by Jesus himself, the true Jewish Messiah, a kingdom of all nations; thus, universal Christianity, freed from all national restrictions or peculiarly Jewish institutions, becomes the true successor of the Old Testament religion; the true Jew must be a follower of Jesus, and, in consequence, leave Judaism behind.

IV. OTHER PROBLEMS IN THE LIGHT OF THE PURPOSE.

If this is a correct exposition of the specific aim of the book, it affords help in the answer of several other questions. Thus it gives a more definite answer to the inquiry concerning

the readers especially in the writer's mind (*cf.* § II). It becomes clear that the book was intended, not for Jews as such, but *for Jewish Christians*. Were the book designed simply to prove the Messiahship of Jesus, it might be supposed to be addressed to unconverted Jews, and intended to persuade them to accept Jesus as the Christ. But if the argument for the Messiahship of Jesus is but the first step of the whole, and if the ultimate purpose is to convince the reader, on historical grounds, that Christianity is not a national but a universal religion, that the old limitations of Judaism, though valid in their own time, have, by the Jewish rejection of the Messiah, been broken down, this is evidently a line of thought which would be addressed to a Christian, either to persuade him to abandon his narrow Judaistic type of Christianity, or to dissuade him from turning back from Christianity to Judaism itself. Were the book less careful to recognize the legitimacy of the Old Testament, and the primary mission of Jesus to the Jews, and, in general, to adapt its argument to the Jewish point of view, its contention for a universal Christianity might seem to point to Gentile Christians as the reader whom the writer had in mind. But faced, as it constantly is, to the thought of the Jew, such a destination for the book is excluded.

But while intended for Jewish Christian readers, the book is emphatically *not of a Judaistic cast*. It is even more directly opposed to the Judaizing type of Christianity than most of the writings of Paul which deal with that question. The apostle to the Gentiles confined himself for the most part to defending the right of the Gentiles to believe in Jesus and enter into all the privileges of Christians without becoming subject to the law. Of course, the logic of this position involved a like freedom ultimately for the Jew, and Paul could, on occasion, insist upon this (Gal. 2: 15-19; Eph. 2: 14-16), yet always *for the sake of* the Gentile, whose interests he, as the apostle of the Gentile, was concerned to defend. But this gospel, addressed to Jewish Christians, shows from the teaching and conduct of Jesus that for the Jew also the old régime has ended; the nation that rejected the Messiah is itself rejected; its temple, the center of ritual and

worship, is overthrown; its house is left unto it desolate; the kingdom of God is taken from it and given unto a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof; the Old Testament foundation of the kingdom is not for a moment repudiated, but on the basis of the teaching of the Old Testament and of the words of Jesus the Christ, the Christian church, drawn from all nations and having no special relation to the temple or Judaism, is shown to be the inheritor of the kingdom.

In the light of this purpose of the book, its *unity* is clearly evident. From the assertion in its first verse that Jesus is the Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham, to the commission which in its closing paragraph this Christ, now risen from the dead, gives to his apostles to make disciples of all nations, one thought dominates it. This is no patchwork put together by several hands working with different conceptions, or by one editor whose only thought was to include all the evangelic material that he possessed. The writer may have employed as sources of his book other gospel writings; the resemblance of some of the material to that which is contained in the other gospels seems to show that he had such sources; but, whether so or not, he has wrought all his material into a real book, with a definite course of thought and a clearly defined aim.

Nor can it be doubted that the writer had before him *a definite situation*, a practical problem to solve, not a merely theoretical proposition to prove. He is a man of thought, even of a reflective turn of mind; but his book is far from being a mere meditative study. Though so different in form and style, it reminds us by its purpose of the epistle to the Hebrews, which was written to those who, having received the knowledge of the truth, were in danger of drawing back and of not holding fast the confession of their faith (Heb. 10: 19-39). There is much to suggest that our evangelist wrote not, indeed, for the same persons, but for those who were subject to a similar danger. Was it, perhaps, for those who, having till now held fast to Judaism, only adding to it faith in Jesus as the Messiah, but now seeing the near approach of the destruction of Jerusalem, or possibly having already witnessed it, were in danger of

surrendering their Christianity under the effect of the blow which had fallen upon Judaism? To save them from this danger it would be needful to separate Judaism and Christianity in their minds; while confirming their faith in Jesus as the Christ of prophecy, to show them that he had himself announced precisely that which was now happening, and had in anticipation of it founded a Christianity which was at the same time the legitimate successor of the Old Testament religion and free from its national restrictions. But whether it was the destruction of Jerusalem, impending or already past, which furnished the immediate occasion for the book or not, it seems impossible to doubt that it was written primarily to convince Jewish Christians that the religion of Jesus was not merely the Judaism of the temple, *plus* a belief in Jesus as the Messiah, but a world-religion, freed from all bounds and restrictions that were local and national. It carries the doctrine of the apostle Paul to the conclusion which Paul saw to be involved in it, but to which he was not wont himself to press it.

The following is an attempt to exhibit the plan of the book as it lay in the writer's mind:

ANALYSIS OF THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW.

- | | |
|---|--------------|
| I. THE BIRTH AND INFANCY OF JESUS. The Advent of the Messiah in accordance with prophecy. | chaps. 1, 2 |
| 1. The genealogy of Jesus, showing his Abrahamic and Davidic descent. | 1 : 1-17 |
| 2. The annunciation to Joseph, and the birth of Jesus from the virgin, as prophesied. | 1 : 18-25 |
| 3. The visit of the Magi, giving occasion to the testimony of the Jewish doctors that Bethlehem was the prophesied birthplace of the Messiah. | 2 : 1-12 |
| 4. The flight into Egypt, fulfilling prophecy. | 2 : 13-15 |
| 5. The murder of the children of Bethlehem, fulfilling prophecy. | 2 : 16-18 |
| 6. The return from Egypt and removal to Nazareth, fulfilling prophecy. | 2 : 19-23 |
| II. PREPARATION FOR THE PUBLIC WORK OF JESUS. Events preparatory to the founding of the kingdom. | 3 : 1-4 : 11 |
| 1. The preparatory ministry of John the Baptist, in accordance with prophecy. | 3 : 1-12 |

2. The baptism of Jesus, accompanied by the descent of the Spirit and the voice from heaven. 3 : 13-17
3. The temptation in the wilderness, settling the principles on which his work was to be done. 4 : 1-11
- III. THE MINISTRY IN GALILEE. The kingdom founded and its fundamental principles set forth. 4 : 12-18 : 35
1. The beginning of Jesus' work in Galilee. 4 : 12-25
 - a. The removal to Capernaum and the beginning of preaching. 4 : 12-17
 - b. The call of the Four to evangelistic work. 4 : 18-22
 - c. Jesus' early work in Galilee ; his widespread fame. 4 : 23-25
- ¹ 2. The Sermon on the Mount ; the ethical principles of the kingdom. chaps. 5-7
3. A group of events, each of which either illustrates or attests the authority which in the sermon he has assumed. 8 : 1-9 : 34
 - a. A leper cleansed. 8 : 1-4
 - b. The centurion's servant healed. 8 : 5-13
 - c. Peter's wife's mother healed. 8 : 14-18
 - d. Answers to disciples about following him. 8 : 19-22
 - e. The stilling of the tempest. 8 : 23-27
 - f. The Gadarene demoniacs. 8 : 28-34
 - g. A paralytic healed and his sins forgiven. [Note here the relation implied between power and authority.] 9 : 1-8
 - h. The call of Matthew. 9 : 9-13
 - i. Answer concerning fasting. 9 : 14-17
 - j. A ruler's daughter raised, and a woman healed. 9 : 18-26
 - k. Two blind men and a dumb demoniac healed. 9 : 27-34
4. Discourse to the Twelve on sending them out ; the proclamation of the kingdom. 9 : 35-10 : 42
5. Events showing the attitude of various persons toward the gospel, and teaching concerning the spirit in which the gospel must be received. chaps. 11, 12
 - a. Jesus' answer to the message from John the Baptist. 11 : 1-6
 - b. The captious spirit of the Jews condemned by Jesus. 11 : 7-19
 - c. Woes against the cities which had not repented at the preaching of Jesus. 11 : 20-24
 - d. The thanksgiving of Jesus that the gospel is plain to the simple-minded, and his invitation to the heavy-laden. 11 : 25-30
 - e. Plucking grain on the sabbath ; the bigotry of the Pharisees rebuked. 12 : 1-8

¹ It is worthy of notice that each alternate section of this Part III (see 2, 4, 6, 8) is a discourse of Jesus : all these discourses treat of the kingdom of heaven, and together constitute an exposition of the kingdom in its various phases.

- f.* Healing of the withered hand on the Sabbath ; bigotry
issuing in murderous purpose. 12 : 9-14
- g.* Jesus heals many ; the gentleness of his ministry. 12 : 15-21
- h.* Jesus heals a blind and dumb demoniac ; the Phari-
sees charge him with collusion with Satan, and Jesus
warns them of the danger of blasphemy against the
Holy Spirit. 12 : 22-37
- i.* The Pharisees seek a sign ; Jesus' answer. 12 : 38-42
- j.* The man from whom the unclean spirit has gone out ;
a parable of the Jewish nation. 12 : 43-45
- k.* The real basis of relationship to Christ. 12 : 46-50
- 6. Discourse of parables, chiefly concerning the growth
of the kingdom. 13 : 1-52
- 7. The events of the later part of the Galilean ministry, illus-
trating especially the increasing unbelief and opposition
of the Pharisees, and the instruction of the disciples,
particularly from ^a 16 : 21 on, in preparation for his
death. 13 : 53-17 : 27
- a.* The unbelief of the Nazarenes. 13 : 53-58
- b.* The death of John the Baptist at the hands of Herod. 14 : 1-12
- c.* The feeding of the five thousand. 14 : 13-22
- d.* Jesus walking on the water, and Peter's attempt to
do so. 14 : 23-36
- e.* Eating with unwashed hands ; the Pharisees' criticism,
and Jesus' answer. 15 : 1-20
- f.* The faith of a Canaanitish woman. 15 : 21-28
- g.* A multitude healed by the Sea of Galilee. 15 : 29-31
- h.* The feeding of the four thousand. 15 : 32-39

^a Chap. 16 : 21 marks an epoch which is in a sense more important than that indicated at 19 : 1, and there is certainly something to be said for the view that the author meant to mark here the beginning of a new division of his book and of a new period of the work of Jesus, characterized by the preparation of his disciples for his death, as the ministry up to this time had been mainly devoted to the proclamation of the kingdom to the people (*cf.* 4 : 17, and notice the similarity of the phrase to that used in 16 : 21). Yet, on the whole, it seems probable that the great divisions of the book are made on the basis of external characteristics, mainly geographical. The periods thus made are marked in general by distinctive internal characteristics also. In the case of the close of the Galilean ministry, however, the change in internal characteristics antedates somewhat the change of place. At the time denoted by 16 : 21 it is already clear that he must die at the hands of the Jews, and in Jerusalem ; and, moreover, that the minds of his disciples must be prepared for this event. From this time on, the evangelist indicates, this preparation fills a prominent place in Jesus' work, and his face is in a sense toward Jerusalem, where he is to die. The change in the character of his teaching and the change of place both result from the same cause ; yet it is not unnatural that the former should precede the latter by a brief interval.

- i. Pharisees and Sadducees demand a sign ; Jesus' answer. 16 : 1-4
 - j. The leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees ; Jesus' warning and the slowness of the disciples to understand. 16 : 5-12
 - k. Peter's confession of Jesus as the Messiah, 16 : 13-20
 - l. Jesus begins to instruct his disciples concerning his death and resurrection. 16 : 21-28
 - m. The transfiguration, wherein Jesus is declared to be the Son of God. 17 : 1-13
 - n. The epileptic boy healed. 17 : 14-20
 - o. Jesus again foretells his death. 17 : 22, 23
 - p. The payment of the temple tax and Jesus' instruction of Peter concerning relation to the temple worship. 17 : 24-27
- 8. Discourse on ambition, humility, and forgiveness ; the personal relations of the citizens of the kingdom to one another. chap. 18
- IV. JOURNEY THROUGH PEREA TO JERUSALEM. Jesus continues the instruction of his disciples, especially, in the latter part, concerning his death. chaps. 19, 20
 - 1. The departure from Galilee. 19 : 1, 2
 - 2. Answer to questions concerning divorce. 19 : 3-12
 - 3. Christ blesses little children, and reproves his disciples. 19 : 13-15
 - 4. Answer to the rich young man concerning eternal life. 19 : 16-22
 - 5. Instruction to the disciples concerning riches as an obstacle to entrance into the kingdom. 19 : 23-26
 - 6. Concerning the rewards of discipleship. 19 : 27-20 : 16
 - 7. Jesus foretells his crucifixion. 20 : 17-19
 - 8. The ambition of James and John, and Jesus' answer concerning suffering and rewards in his service. 20 : 20-28
 - 9. The two blind men near Jericho, who hail Jesus as son of David. 20 : 29-34
- V. THE CLOSING MINISTRY IN JERUSALEM. [Passion week.]
The last offer of the Messiah to the nation and the final rejection. chaps. 21-27
 - 1. Symbolic proclamation of himself as the Messiah. 21 : 1-17
 - a. The triumphal entry. 21 : 1-11
 - b. The cleansing of the temple. 21 : 12-17
 - 2. Symbolic prediction to the disciples of the rejection of the nation. 21 : 18-22
 - 3. The mutual rejection. The Jews resist the claim of Jesus ; he reiterates warning and prediction. 21 : 23-23 : 39
 - a. The Jews' challenge of his authority to cleanse the temple, and his answer to them. 21 : 23-27

<i>b.</i>	Three parables of warning.	21 : 27-22 : 14
<i>a)</i>	The parable of the two sons.	21 : 23-32
<i>b)</i>	The parable of the husbandmen, predicting the rejection of the nation.	21 : 33-46
<i>c)</i>	The parable of the marriage of the king's son.	22 : 1-14
<i>d.</i>	Three questions by the Jewish rulers.	22 : 15-40
<i>a)</i>	Concerning paying tribute.	22 : 15-22
<i>b)</i>	Concerning the resurrection.	22 : 23-33
<i>c)</i>	Concerning the greatest commandment.	22 : 34-40
<i>e.</i>	Jesus' question concerning the Christ.	22 : 41-46
<i>f.</i>	Jesus' great discourse against the Pharisees.	chap. 23
4.	Prophetic discourse to the disciples concerning the end of the nation and the end of the age.	chaps. 24, 25
5.	Preparation for the death of Jesus.	26 : 1-46
<i>a.</i>	By his enemies ; the plot to put him to death.	26 : 1-5
<i>b.</i>	By his friends ; the anointing.	26 : 6-13
<i>c.</i>	By Judas ; the bargain to betray him.	26 : 14-16
<i>d.</i>	By Jesus himself.	26 : 17-46
<i>a)</i>	The last supper.	26 : 17-30
<i>b)</i>	The warning to the disciples.	26 : 31-35
<i>c)</i>	The prayer and the agony.	26 : 36-46
6.	The consummation of the rejection of Jesus by the Jews.	26 : 47-27 : 66
<i>a.</i>	The arrest.	26 : 47-56
<i>b.</i>	The trial.	26 : 57-27 : 31
<i>c.</i>	The crucifixion and the death.	27 : 32-56
<i>d.</i>	The burial.	27 : 57-61
<i>e.</i>	The watch at the tomb.	27 : 62-66
VI.	THE APPEARANCES OF JESUS AFTER THE RESURRECTION.	
	The triumph of the Messiah over his enemies and the commission of the disciples to win all nations to him.	chap. 28
1.	The appearance on the resurrection morning.	28 : 1-10
2.	The report of the watch ; attempt of the Jews to suppress the evidence.	28 : 11-15
3.	The appearance in Galilee ; the commission of the disciples.	28 : 16-20